

## A BOY I KNEW.

BY LAURENCE HUTTON.

HE was not a very good boy, or a very bad boy, or a very bright boy, or an unusual boy in any way. He was just a boy; and very often he forgets that he is not a boy now. Whatever there may be about The Boy that is

for others. To her it was blessed to give, and it was not very pleasant to receive. When she bought anything The Boy's stereotyped query was, "Who is to have it?" When anything was bought for her, her own invariable remark was—

"What on earth shall I do with it?" When The Boy came to her, one summer morning, she looked upon him as a gift from Heaven; and when she was told that it *was* a boy, and not a bad-looking or a bad-conditioned boy, her first words were—"What on earth shall I do with it?"

She found plenty "to do with it" before she got through with it, more than forty years afterwards; and The Boy has every reason to believe that she never regretted the gift. Indeed, she once told him, late in her life, that he had never made her cry! What better benediction can a boy have than that?

The Boy was red-headed and long-nosed even from the beginning; a shy, dreaming, self-conscious little boy, made peculiarly familiar with his personal defects by the constant remarks to the effect that his hair *was* red, and that his nose *was* long. At school, for years he was known familiarly as "Rufus," "Red-Head," "Carrot-Top," or "Nosey."

His mother, married at nineteen, was the eldest of a family of

commendable he owes to his father and to his mother; and he feels that he should not be held responsible for it.

His mother was the most generous and the most unselfish of human beings. She was always thinking of somebody else; always doing

nine children; and many of The Boy's aunts and uncles were but a few years his senior and were his daily and familiar companions. He was the only member of his own generation for a long time, and there was a constant fear upon the part of the elders that he



THE BOY PROMOTED TO TROUSERS.

was likely to be spoiled; and consequently he was never praised, nor petted, nor coddled.



"ALWAYS IN THE WAY."

He was always falling down, or dropping things, he was always getting into the way; and he could not learn to spell correctly nor to cipher at all. He was never in his mother's way, however, and he was never made to feel so. But nobody except The Boy knows of the agony which the rest of the family, unconsciously and with no thought of hurting his feelings, caused him, by the fun they poked at his nose, at his fiery locks, and at his unhandiness. He fancied that passers-by pitied him as he walked or played in the streets; and he sincerely pitied himself as a youth destined to grow up into an awkward, tactless, stupid man at whom the world would laugh so long as his life lasted.

The Boy's father was a scholar, and a ripe and good one. Self-made and self-taught, he began the serious struggle of life when he was merely a boy himself; and reading, and writing, and spelling, and languages, and mathematics came to him by nature. He acquired by slow degrees a fine library, and out of it a vast amount of information. He never bought a book that he did not read, and he never

read a book unless he considered it worth buying and worth keeping. Languages and mathematics were his particular delight. When he was tired he rested himself by the solving of a geometrical problem. He studied his Bible in Latin, in Greek, in Hebrew; and he had no small smattering of Sanskrit. His chief recreation, on Sunday afternoon or on a long summer evening, was a walk with The Boy among the Hudson River docks, when the business of the day or the week was over and the ship was left in charge of some old quartermaster or third mate. To these sailors the father would talk in each sailor's own tongue, whether it were Dutch or Danish, Spanish or Swedish, Russian or Prussian, always to the great wonderment of The Boy, who to this day, after many years of foreign travel, knows little more of French than "*Combien?*" and little more of Italian than "*Troppo caro.*" Why none of these qualities of mind came to The Boy by direct descent he does not know. He only knows that he did inherit from his parent, in an intellectual way, a sense of humor, a love for books as books, and a certain respect for the men by whom books are written.



THE BOY IN KILTS.

It seemed to The Boy that his father knew everything. Any question upon any subject was

sure to bring a prompt, intelligent, and intelligible answer; and, usually, an answer followed by a question, on the father's part, which made The Boy think the matter out for himself.

The Boy was always a little bit afraid of his father, while he loved and respected him. When his father said, "Do this," it was done. When his father told him to go or to come, he went or he came. And yet he never felt the weight of his father's hand, except in the way of kindness; and, as he looks back upon his boyhood and his manhood, he cannot recall an angry or a hasty word or a rebuke that was not merited and kindly bestowed. His father, like the true Scotchman that he was, never praised him; but he never blamed him — except for cause.

The Boy has no recollection of his first tooth, but he remembers his first toothache as distinctly as he remembers his latest; and he could not quite understand *then* why, when The Boy cried over that raging molar, the father walked the floor, and seemed to suffer from it even more than did The Boy; or why, when The Boy had a sore throat, the father always had symptoms of bronchitis or quinsy.

The father did not live long enough to find out whether The Boy was to amount to much or not; and while The Boy is proud of the fact that he is his father's son, he would be prouder still if he could think that he had done something to make his father proud of *him*.

The Boy was taught, from the earliest awakening of his reasoning powers, that truth was to be told and to be respected,

and that nothing was more wicked or more ungentlemanly than a broken promise. He learned very early to do as he was told, and not to do, under any consideration, what he had said he would not do. Upon this last point he was strictly conscientious, although once, literally, he "beat about the bush." His



THE BOY'S FATHER.

Aunt Margaret, always devoted to plants and to flowers, had, on the back stoop of his grandfather's house, a little grove of orange and lemon trees in pots. Some one of these was usually in fruit or in flower, and the fruit to The Boy was a great temptation. He was very fond of oranges, and it seemed to him that a "home-made" orange, which he had never tasted, must be much better than a grocer's orange; as home-made cake was certainly preferable, even

to the wonderful cakes made by the professional Mrs. Milderberger. He watched those little green oranges from day to day, as they gradually grew big and yellow in the sun. He promised faithfully that he would not pick any, but he had a notion that some of them might drop off. He never shook the trees, because he said he would not. But he shook the stoop! And he hung about the bush, which he was too honest to beat. One unusually tempting orange, which he had known from its bud-hood, finally overcame him. He did not pick it off, he did not shake it off; he compromised with his conscience by lying flat on his back and biting off



"CRIED, BECAUSE HE HAD BEEN KISSED."

a piece of it. It was not a very good action, nor was it a good orange, and for that reason, perhaps, he went home immediately and told on himself. He told his mother. He did not tell his Aunt Margaret. His mother did not seem to be as much shocked at his conduct as he was. But, in her own quaint way, she gave him to understand that promises were not made to be cracked any more than they were made to be broken—that he had been false to himself in heart, if not in deed, and that he must go back and make it "all right" with his Aunt Margaret. She did not seem to be very much shocked, either; he could not tell why. But they punished

The Boy. They made him eat the rest of the orange!

He lost all subsequent interest in that tropical glade, and he has never cared much for domestic oranges since.

The Boy's first act of self-reliance and of conscious self-dependence was a very happy moment in his young life; and it consisted in his being able to step over the nursery fender all alone, and to toast his own shins thereby, without falling into the fire. His first realization of "getting big" came to him about the same time, and with a mingled shock of pain and pleasure, when he discovered that he could not walk under the high kitchen table without bumping his head. He tried it very often before he learned to go around that article of furniture, on his way from the clothes-rack, which was his tent when he camped out on rainy days, to the sink, which was his oasis in the desert of the basement floor. This kitchen was a favorite playground of The Boy, and about that kitchen-table center many of the happiest of his early reminiscences. Ann Hughes, the cook, was very good to The Boy. She told him stories, and taught him riddles, all about a certain "Miss Netticoat," who wore a white petticoat, and who had a red nose, and about whom there still lingers a queer, contradictory legend to the effect that "the longer she stands the shorter she grows." The Boy always felt that, on account of her nose, there was a peculiar bond of sympathy between little Miss Netticoat and himself.

As he was all boy in his games, he would never cherish anything but a boy-doll, generally a Highlander, in kilts and with a glengarry that came off.

Although he became foreman of a juvenile hook-and-ladder company before he was five, and would not play with girls at all, he had one peculiar feminine weakness. His grand passion was washing and ironing. And Ann Hughes used to let him do all the laundry-work connected with the wash-rags and his own pocket-handkerchiefs, into which, regularly every Wednesday, he burned little brown holes with the toy flat-iron, which *would* get too hot. But Johnny Robertson and Joe Stuart and the other boys, and even the uncles and the aunts,



"GOOD MORNING, BOYS!"

never knew anything about this—unless Ann Hughes gave it away!

The Boy seems to have developed, very early in life, a fondness for new clothes—a fondness which his wife sometimes thinks he has quite outgrown. It is recorded that almost his first plainly spoken words were "Coat and hat," uttered upon his promotion into a more boyish apparel than the caps and frocks of his infancy. And he remembers very distinctly his first pair of long trousers, and the impression they made upon him, in more ways than one. They were a black-and-white check, and to them was attached that especially manly article, the suspender. They were originally worn in celebration of the birth of the New Year, in 1848 or 1849, and The Boy went to his father's store in Hudson Street, New York, to exhibit them on the next business-day thereafter. Naturally they excited much comment, and were the subject of sincere congratulation. And two young clerks of his father, The Boy's uncles, amused themselves, and The Boy, by

playing with him a then popular game called "Squails." They put The Boy, seated, on a long counter, and they slid him, backward and forward between them, with great skill and with no little force. But, before the championship was decided, The Boy's mother broke up the game, boxed the ears of the players, and carried the human disk home in disgrace.

He remembers nothing more about the trousers, except the fact that for a time he was allowed to appear in them only on Sundays and holidays, and that he was deeply chagrined at having to go back to knickerbockers at school and at play.

The Boy's first boots were of about this same era. They were what were then known as "Wellingtons," and they had legs. The legs had red leather tops, as was the fashion in those days, and the boots were pulled on with straps. They were always taken off with the aid of the boot-jack of The Boy's father, although they could have been removed much more easily without the use of that instrument. Great was the day when The Boy first wore his first boots to school; and great his delight at the sensation he thought they created when they were shown in the primary department.

The Boy's first school was a dame's school,



PLAYING "SCHOOL."

kept by a Miss or Mrs. Harrison, in Harrison Street, near the Hudson Street house in which he was born. He was the smallest child in the



THE BOY'S MOTHER.

establishment, and probably a pet of the larger girls, for he remembers going home to his mother in tears once, because one of them had kissed him behind the class-room door.

At that school he met his first love, one Phoebe Hawkins, a very pretty, sweet girl, as he recalls her, and, of course, considerably his senior. How far he had advanced in the spelling of proper names at that period is shown by the well-authenticated fact that he put himself on record once as "loving his love with an F, because she was Feeby!"

Poor Phoebe Hawkins died before she was out of her teens. The family moved to Poughkeepsie when The Boy was ten or twelve, and his mother and he went there one day from Red Hook, which was their own summer home, to call upon his love. When they asked at the railway-station where the Hawkinses lived and how they could find the house, they were told that the carriages for the funeral would meet the next train. And, utterly unprepared for such a greeting, for at latest accounts she had

been in perfect health, they stood, with her friends, by the side of Phoebe's open grave.

In his mind's eye The Boy, at the end of forty years, can see it all, and his childish grief is still fresh in his memory.

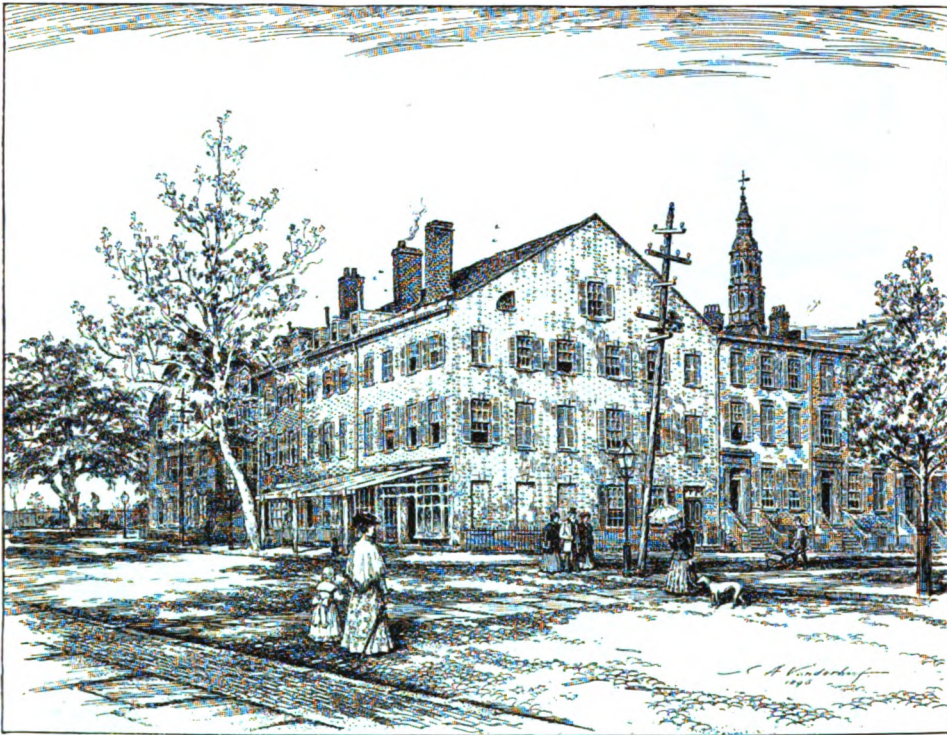
In 1850 or 1852 The Boy went to another dame's school. It was kept by Miss Kilpatrick, on Franklin or North Moore Street. From this, as he grew in years, he was sent to the Primary Department of the North Moore Street Public School, at the corner of West Broadway, where he remained three weeks, and where he contracted a whooping-cough which lasted him three months. The other boys used to throw his hat upon an awning in the neighborhood, and then throw their own hats up under the awning in order to bounce The Boy's hat off—an amusement for which he never much cared. They were not very nice boys anyway, especially when they made fun of his maternal grandfather, who was a trustee of the school and who sometimes noticed The Boy after the morning prayers were said. The grandfather was very popular in the school. He came in every day, stepped up on the raised platform at the Principal's desk, and said in his broad Scotch, "Good morning, boys!" to which the entire body of pupils, at the top of their lungs, and with one voice, replied, "*G-o-o-d morning, Mr. Scott!*" This was considered a great feature in the school, and strangers used to come from all over the city to witness it. Somehow it made The Boy a little bit ashamed, he does not



JOHNNY ROBERTSON.

know why. He would have liked it well enough, and been touched by it, too, if it had been some other boy's grandfather. The Boy's father was present once—The Boy's first day; but when he discovered that the President of the Board of Trustees was going to call on him for a speech he ran away; and The Boy would have given all his little possessions to have run after him. The Boy knew then as well as he knows now how his father felt, and he thinks of that occasion every time he runs





THE HOUSE OF THE BOY'S GRANDFATHER — CORNER OF HUDSON AND NORTH MOORE STREETS.

away from some speech he, himself, is called upon to make.

After his North Moore Street experience The Boy was sent to study under men teachers in boys' schools; and he considered then that he was grown up.

The Boy, as has been said, was born without the sense of spell. The Rule of Three, it puzzled him, and fractions were as bad; and the proper placing of e and i, or i and e, the doubling of letters in the middle of words, and how to treat the addition of a suffix in "y" or "tion" "always drove him mad," from his childhood up. He hated to go to school, but he loved to *play* school; and when Johnny Robertson and he were not conducting a pompous, public funeral—a certain oblong hat-brush, with a rosewood back, studded with brass tacks, serving as a coffin, in

which lay the body of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, or the Duke of Wellington, all of whom died when Johnny and The Boy were about eight years old—they were teaching each other the three immortal and exceedingly trying "R's"—reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic—in a play-school. Their favorite spelling-book was a certain old cook-book, discarded by the head of the kitchen, and considered all that was necessary for their educational purpose. From this, one afternoon, Johnnie gave out "doughnut," with the following surprising result. Conscious of the puzzling presence of certain silent consonants and vowels, The Boy thus set it down: "D-O-dough, N-O-U-G-H-T, nut—doughnut!" and he went up head in a class of one, neither teacher nor pupil perceiving the funny blunder The Boy had made.

(To be continued.)